

⚡ COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND ⚡

DEFENDER

Volume 2, Issue 4

Winter 2017

**SCOTT
SNYDER:**
WHY THE FIGHT FOR
COMICS MATTERS

**2017: THE YEAR
IN CENSORSHIP**

**THE WAR ON
CHRISTMAS COMICS!**



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

A comic convention shut down by armed militia. A cartoonist held without charge while trying to renew his passport. Graphic novels for younger readers banned and repeatedly challenged all over the U.S. A superintendent of schools orders the removal of any library materials containing “profanity, cursing or inappropriate subject matter.” These are just a few of the many headlines defining the culture of comics censorship in the U.S. and abroad at the end of 2017. Stories like these are why your support of CBLDF is so important.

As we do each quarter, this issue of *CBLDF Defender* brings you the latest news on comics censorship so you can be more informed and get more involved. On page 3, we recap the year in challenges to comics in schools and libraries, where we saw the majority of cases involving mainstream graphic novels for younger readers. These books address important themes, including LGBTQIA identity, sexuality, and the challenges of adolescence. But more importantly, these are entertaining books that kids want to read. CBLDF fights so they can do so!

On page 4, our news section recounts the latest CBLDF battles on the Censorship Scorecard and a major victory in California, where our efforts helped contribute to the revision of California’s troubling autograph law. The new law repairs many of the old law’s harmful provisions, which could have chilled the rights of creators, retailers, and convention organizations in that state.

On page 9, we reflect on the Fund’s extensive efforts in “2017: The Year In Censorship.” Legal action protecting creators, a new workshop series for retailers, and litigation fighting unconstitutional laws were just some of the highlights of CBLDF’s constant legal action. We also interceded in dozens of book challenges and aided librarians and educators, while also creating some incredible education tools like our new handbook, *Panel Power!*

Scott Snyder sums it all up perfectly in his keynote on page 6:

“As the political climate has changed and darkened, our response needs to be more urgent than ever. The right to read, the right to find books that inspire you, the right to express yourself through literature, through graphic literature, through comics—all of that is more immediate than ever right now, sincerely. CBLDF, the work that it does by promoting access to books that are challenged, by defending creators and retailers that have been attacked by different groups, is just overwhelmingly brave and daring.”

We are able to do our invaluable work because of your support. Please help us continue to make a difference in 2018 by staying informed, speaking out, and contributing however you can!

—Charles Brownstein, Executive Director

CBLDF thanks our Guardian Members:

James Wood Bailey, Grant Geissman, and Philip Harvey

CBLDF’s education program made possible with the generous support of the Gaiman Foundation and supporters like you!



COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the First Amendment rights of the comics art form and its community of retailers, creators, publishers, librarians, educators, and readers. CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education in furtherance of these goals.

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COMICS CENSORSHIP SURGES IN 2017

Comics came under constant fire in 2017. CBLDF was on the case, supporting numerous defenses and keeping an eye on challenges. Here's a snapshot of the comics that were called out this year.

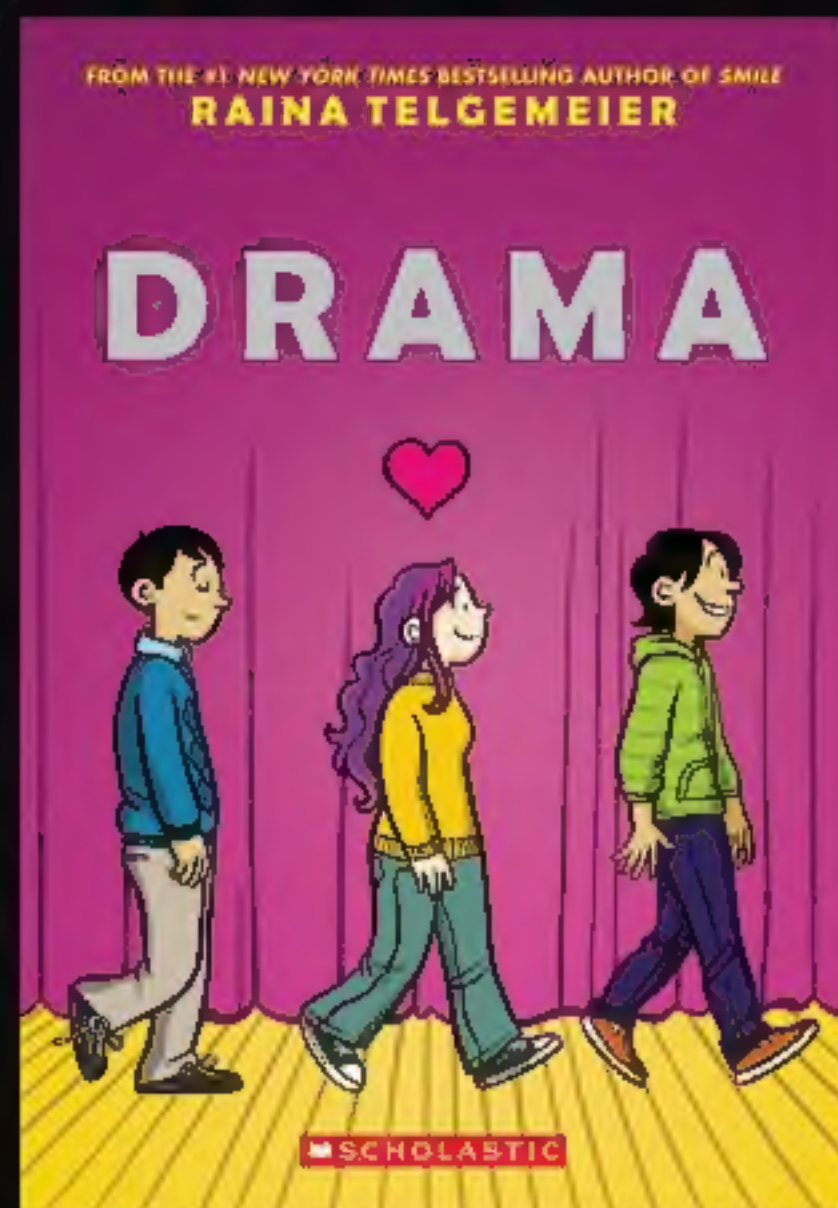
***This One Summer* by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki**

This groundbreaking graphic novel was the most frequently banned book of 2016 according to the American Library Association. While it has won incredible plaudits, including the Caldecott and Printz honors, it has been challenged in several locations for LGBTQIA content, depiction of drug use, and profanity. Some have called the book sexually explicit even though it contains no nudity or sexual depiction.



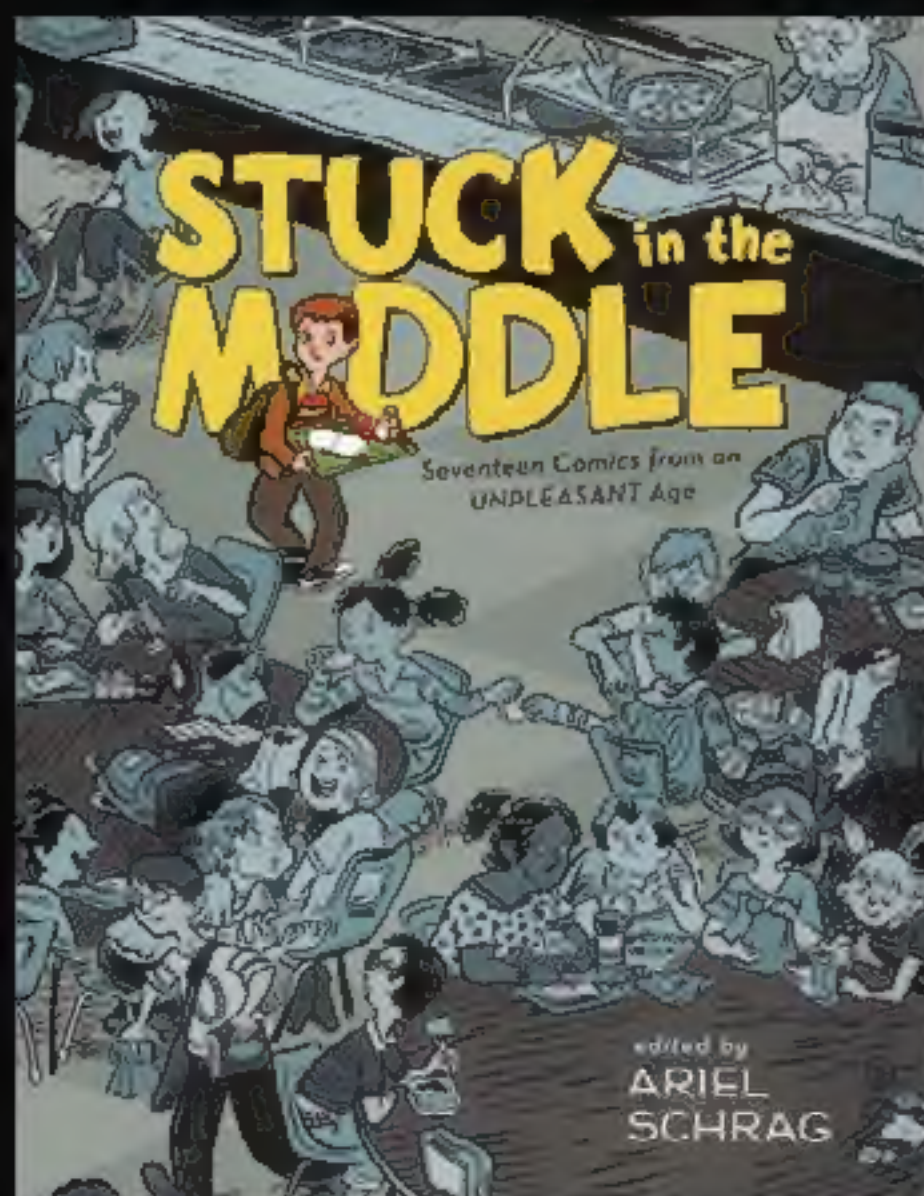
***Drama* by Raina Telgemeier**

This endearing middle grades graphic novel earned the number two spot on ALA's 2016 list of frequently banned books. The book explores coming of age themes in the context of a middle school drama club. It has been challenged in multiple locations for LGBTQIA characters, sexual content, and offensive political viewpoint. However, as the book's millions of readers can attest, the kid-friendly graphic novel reflects everyday life in a charming, naturalistic way. Sadly, the book continues to be banned in places like Franklin Independent School District in Texas.



***Stuck in the Middle*, Edited by Ariel Schrag**

CBLDF led the defense of *Stuck in the Middle* after it was pulled from the Del Crest Middle School library in Oklahoma over a challenge for language and adult themes. A statement from Mid-Del Schools indicated that the district had formed a review committee per policy, but school board meeting notes include no



discussion of the book. A check of the online library catalog indicates that the middle school no longer holds a copy of the book—a de facto ban.

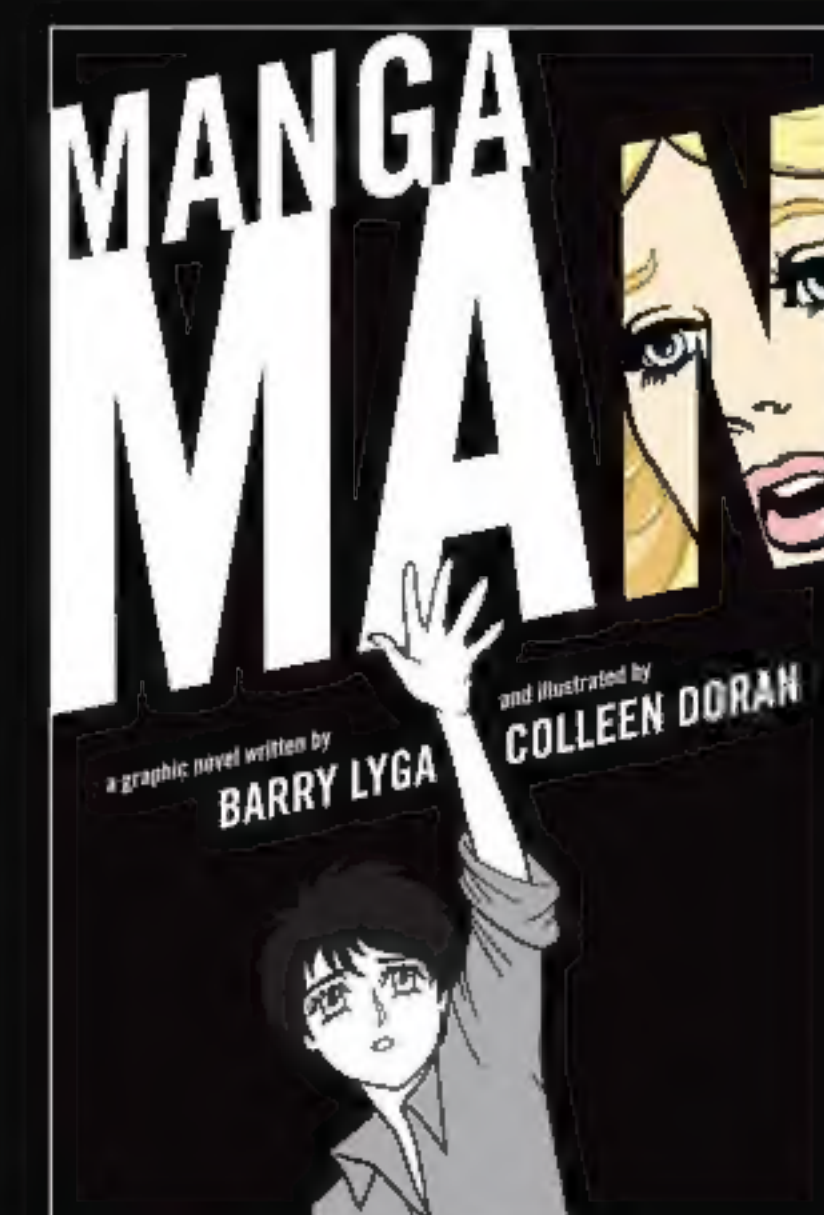
***Sword Art Online* by Reki Kawahara and abec**

CBLDF took point on the defense of *Sword Art Online: Aincrad*, the first volume in an immensely popular manga series. The book was challenged by a middle school teacher in Jerome, Idaho, for “inappropriate” language and images. A review committee recommended that the book be retained.



***Mangaman* by Barry Lyga and Colleen Doran**

The mother of a high school student in Issaquah, Washington pushed to have the graphic novel *Mangaman* removed from Issaquah High School's library due to one panel showing pixelated genitals. The book was retained after passing through a review committee, public forum, and the school board.



***Big Hard Sex Criminals* by Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky**

The number seven title on the most challenged books of 2016, a collection of the critically acclaimed series was removed by staff and administrators at an undisclosed library because they considered it sexually explicit. *Big Hard Sex Criminals* was the sole book for adult readers to appear on ALA's annual list.



CBLDF is active in preventing and responding to library and school challenges. If you learn of a challenge in your community, or if you need help yourself, contact us immediately at 1-800-99-CBLDF or info@cbldf.org!

Libya Comic Con Shut Down by Armed Militia

Libya's second annual comic con was cut short when it was stormed by armed militia forces, who shut down the event and detained several people. Most were released (not exactly unscathed) but the militia says six organizers will be turned over to prosecutors for "attack on morals and modesty" of young people.

The militia known as RADA Special Deterrence Forces objected to numerous aspects of the event: women attending without hijab; posters of Wonder Woman and Catwoman; perceived Christian, Buddhist, Satanic, or atheist elements of the art and Japanese calligraphy on display; and fans who attended in costume. In the runup to the con, organizers had been fighting social media rumors that it was a Halloween event—viewed as both Satanic and a Western import by RADA and other Libyan hardliners.

In the political vacuum following the fall of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, RADA acts as an unof-

ficial police force for the interim government. The group announced its shutdown of Libya Comic Con on its own Facebook page, alleging that "[t]his sort of festival imported from abroad exploits the weakness in [young people's] religious faith and their fascination with foreign cultures." RADA seemed to take a page directly from Fredric Wertham, adding:

It is necessary to address these destructive phenomena and fight them, which drive the dissemination of pornography and feed the minds of teenagers and motivate them to kill and mutilate through well-known cartoons.

According to a con organizer who spoke to the *Libya Herald* on condition of anonymity, some of the detainees taken by RADA had their heads forcibly shaved and "were given a religious lecture" before they were released. An anonymous Wikipedian reported that some detainees were beaten to extract confessions and that the militia has separately detained "youths dressed in rock and roll metal clothing" and accused them of Satanism as well.

CENSORSHIP SCORECARD

CBLDF joins coalition efforts to protect the freedom to read comics. Taking an active stand against all instances of censorship curbs precedent that could adversely affect the rights upon which comics readers depend. Here are a few of our latest cases...

California

WIN: CBLDF joined the National Coalition Against Censorship in asking Rocklin Academy Gateway to uphold their policies after some parents in the community challenged the reading of *I Am Jazz* and *Red: A Crayon's Story* out loud in a kindergarten classroom to help students understand a classmate's gender transition. The school board affirmed the inclusion of LGBTQIA literature in classrooms, but also committed to forewarning parents about potentially controversial material. Free speech advocates note that such flagging policies may invite complaints.

Florida

DEVELOPING: In response to a draconian censorship directive issued by the superintendent of schools in Dixie County, CBLDF joined the Kids' Right to Read Project in defending vast swathes of library and classroom materials in the district. The order targets for removal any library materials, textbooks, or supplemental texts that contain "profanity, cursing, or inappropriate subject matter."

Illinois

WIN: CBLDF and other members of KRRP defended Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* at Alton High School when the book was suspended after one parent simply requested an alternate assignment for their own child. The book was restored, and Alton officials have given teachers the authority to offer an alternate assignment without triggering a review of the primary assignment.

Minnesota

WIN: The school board in Annandale, Minnesota, chose to keep *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in the 9th grade curriculum despite calls from a small group of parents to ban it due to "explicit language." CBLDF and other sponsors of KRRP sent a letter to the board in defense of the book.

Mississippi

WIN: CBLDF joined KRRP to protest the abrupt removal of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the curriculum in Biloxi, Mississippi, in violation of the district's materials review policy. The book was restored but students must now "opt-in," which means only those who return a signed parental permission slip will be allowed to read it for class.

Library of Congress Exhibit to Highlight Women Cartoonists

The Library of Congress will put the spotlight on women in sequential art with *Drawn to Purpose: American Women Illustrators and Cartoonists*, a long-term exhibit featuring nearly 70 original works by artists such as Grace Drayton, Sue Coe, Roz Chast, and Raina Telgemeier. The free exhibit in the Graphic Arts Galleries of the Library's Jefferson Building will be on display for nearly a year, from November 18, 2017, through October 20, 2018. An online version of the exhibit will also be available at www.loc.gov.

Graphic Novelist Held Without Charge in Equatorial Guinea

Ramón Esono Ebalé, a cartoonist from Equatorial Guinea who now lives in El Salvador, made a brief return to Equatorial Guinea in order to renew his passport. He was arrested on September 16 and has not yet been taken before a judge (required under Equatoguinean law within 24 hours) or charged with a crime (required within 72 hours). Ebalé, who works under the pen name Jamón y Queso (Ham and Cheese), frequently targets Equatoguinean dictator Obiang in his political cartoons. Human rights advocates feared that Ebalé would be charged with criminal defamation for his caricatures, but he will more likely be charged with money laundering and currency counterfeiting—neither of which charge would stand up to scrutiny outside the corrupted judicial system in Equatorial Guinea—so authorities can avoid the perception that they are curtailing free expression. In early November, Cartoonists Rights Network International awarded Ebalé with the Courage in Editorial Cartooning award.

Sonny Liew Declines Singapore Government Grant

In 2015, just before publication of Sonny Liew's tour de force *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, Singapore's National Arts Council revoked a grant due to the book's "sensitive content." Liew's work is now a multiple Eisner Award-winning international hit, and the tables have turned: Liew declined another grant from NAC for his next book, citing "the compromises involved in a relationship where genuine dialogue is so limited" as the reason he was returning the grant.

Find out more about these stories and get the latest news every day at
<http://cbldef.org>!

CALIFORNIA "AUTOGRAPH LAW" REPLACED, PROTECTING COMICS RETAILERS & ARTISTS

CBLDF cheers the passage of California Assembly Bill 228, a law that amends the state's flawed "autograph law" passed in 2016. The new law incorporates feedback from CBLDF and other advocacy groups in a way that offers protection for comic book stores, vendors, and artists exhibiting at conventions in the state.

"AB 228's passage is a victory for comic book businesses and artists in California," says CBLDF Executive Director Charles Brownstein, who spearheaded the Fund's efforts on this case. "This new bill provides meaningful protections for expressive materials and removes many ambiguities that could have harmed brick and mortar stores and convention exhibitors in California."

Assembly Bill 228 amends AB 1570, which would have required a certificate of authenticity for any autographed item sold for \$5 or more, including books; overly burdensome record-keeping systems; and the installation of signage about autographed items. AB 228 specifically exempts booksellers, defining "'autographed collectible' to mean an autographed sports or entertainment media item, as specified, sold or offered for sale by a dealer to a consumer for \$50 or more, bearing the signature of a particular person that increases the sale value of the item over that of a comparable item without the actual signature." AB 228 clarifies that "Signed books, manuscripts, and correspondence, as well as ephemera not related to sports or entertainment media," are not considered autographed collectibles, which means they are not regulated by the law.

AB 228 is a huge improvement over AB 1570, but AB 228 may impact retailers whose business isn't limited to only comics and books. We recommend that you contact your legal counsel for guidance.

Learn more at
<http://cbldef.org/?p=32470>

CBLDF was honored to have Scott Snyder, the acclaimed writer of *Batman*, *Dark Nights: Metal*, and *A.D.: After Death*, as the keynote speaker for our annual CBLDF Live Art Auction at San Diego Comic-Con. We hope you find his address as inspiring as we do!



My route into comics was very circuitous. When I was about 10, my parents sent me to athletic camp for the summer, a sleepaway camp. And I remember it vividly: I was a super-obese kid, all I loved was Dungeons & Dragons and comics. And they were like, “You’re going to go to this sports camp and you’re going to get into shape and it’s going to be amazing.”

It was not amazing at all.

The one thing I looked forward to—and I was about 10, 11 years old—was that every night our counselor, I still remember his name was Ted, would read to us from this book *Eyes of the Dragon* by Stephen King. He was a total fellow dragonhead. He knew Dungeons & Dragons. He knew Gary Gygax. He was like your big brother.

I remember all day, trying to do sports and trying to be super-macho. It was an all-boys camp—*Lord of the Flies*! And then looking forward to evening, when I would get to go and listen to this amazing novel. It literally was the moment that engendered my love of reading. It was a seminal sort of instance in my life where I decided the power of storytelling was just what I wanted to be a part of going forward. And so Ted began the book on the first day of camp, and he ended it on the last.

I went home and I immediately signed up for a class that was sort of the great modern classics of literature. And the next book I remember really moving me was *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The profundity of that book, the darkness of that book, just really caught me by surprise, and I decided at that point I wanted to be a writer. John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, that was the next book I really found. Then William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. When I was in my teenage years I discovered short stories, and all I ever wanted to be was a comic book writer, but for some reason I just didn’t know how to find access to comics. So, I kept sort of looking to prose to find a way in through that. The first story collection that really moved me was *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien—I don’t know if anybody’s read that, but it’s an amazing collection about the Vietnam War.

When I began to become very serious about

being a writer after I graduated, the irony of it is, I found my way back into comics by writing stuff that I loved. When I got asked to do this keynote, I was sort of struggling with what am I going to say, what am I going to write about? Nothing I’ve written has been tremendously controversial—I mean, internal editorial fights where you’re like, “I’m never going to work here again, tear up my contract” and all that stuff—but none of it is the front lines of the kind of stuff that CBLDF so bravely deals with.

What I realized when I looked back was that every single one of those books that I’ve just mentioned to you—*Eyes of the Dragon*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Things They Carried*—have been on the most banned and challenged books list at different times. There’ve been tremendous challenges to those books, and when I looked at the books that are challenged, now it goes from *Harry Potter* being the number one, which I read with my children, to the kinds of immediate challenges that are happening now with graphic literature.

With Raina Telgemeier’s *Drama*, with the Tama-ki cousins’ *This One Summer*, censorship is happening all over the place. Sometimes we don’t realize it. As the political climate has changed and darkened, our response needs to be more urgent than ever. The right to read, the right to find books that inspire you, the right to express yourself through literature, through graphic literature, through comics—all of that is more immediate than ever right now, sincerely.

CBLDF, the work that it does by promoting access to books that are challenged, by defending creators and retailers that have been attacked by different groups, is just overwhelmingly brave and daring. I mean it from the bottom of my heart, the fact that CBLDF is so incredibly aggressive about defending creators’ rights even when it’s controversial, defending the right to find books that inspire you, whether it’s politically correct or not, whether they’re the zeitgeist or not. All that stuff is incredibly inspiring, so it’s a huge honor to be here and to encourage you to bid as aggressively, as generously as you can.

GOTT SNYDER: A KEYNOTE



Artwork by Andy Kubert.
(From the variant cover for Dark Nights: Metal #2.
Courtesy of DC Entertainment. Batman © and ™
DC Entertainment.)

Andy
Kubert
BA

2017: THE YEAR IN CENSORSHIP



Artwork by Matthew Loux.
(From the cover for Panel Power. Created for CBLDF.)

Free expression withstood a wide range of attacks in 2017. CBLDF was at the forefront, protecting our community from an increasing tempo of challenges to comics and other expressive material.

LEGAL ACTION

CBLDF took legal action to protect creators and to protest laws and policies that would impede free expression, while also launching a new program for comic book stores.

- ✓ CBLDF provided legal advice and support in a variety of cases affecting creators, readers, and publishers. Thanks to CBLDF, these cases were resolved positively, without going to court.
- ✓ CBLDF's Retailer Rights Workshops help comic store staff protect their rights! Content ranges from in-depth overview of laws governing content to how-to sessions for managing situations like police visits, media attacks, and other areas affecting the right to sell comics. The workshops will continue throughout 2018!
- ✓ The Fund helped facilitate the revision of California's flawed autograph law, protecting the rights of comics retailers, artists, and bookstores.
- ✓ CBLDF joined a Media Coalition amicus brief in *Tobinick v. Novella*, and the court upheld our assertion that speech hosted on a website that also displays ads does not automatically become "commercial speech," a category of speech that has less protection.
- ✓ We joined a Cato Institute-led amicus brief in *Lee v. Tam*, a case in which the Supreme Court unanimously struck down portions of the Lanham Act and upheld an activist Asian-American band's right to an "offensive" trademark.
- ✓ CBLDF continued battling the so-called "*Beloved* bill" in Virginia, which would have required schools to warn parents about materials containing "sexually explicit" content. The most recent attempt was vetoed by the governor.
- ✓ CBLDF joined dozens of organizations to oppose President Donald J. Trump's immigration ban on individuals from predominantly Muslim countries. Such a ban would impact creative freedom, col-

laboration, and the free flow of ideas.

- ✓ CBLDF joined a massive coalition to condemn a Department of Homeland Security proposal that would require non-citizens to provide their social media passwords as a condition of entering the United States. The policy would invade the privacy of foreign nationals and everyone in their social networks, including millions of U.S. citizens. The proposal also could put U.S. citizens at risk as other nations emulate DHS's practices.
- ✓ CBLDF is defending vast swathes of library and classroom materials in Dixie County, Florida, where an order from the superintendent targets for removal any library materials, textbooks, or supplemental texts that contain "profanity, cursing, or inappropriate subject matter."
- ✓ We joined the National Coalition Against Censorship to protest H.B. 103, an overly broad New Hampshire law that was intended to regulate sex education but was so broadly worded that it could impact books in other courses.
- ✓ We joined coalition efforts to protest anti-science bills in Florida, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.

EDUCATOR AND LIBRARIAN SUPPORT

Teachers and librarians continue to be on censorship's front lines, and CBLDF has their backs. During 2017:

- ✓ We co-signed more than a dozen letters of support to battle book challenges around the country.
- ✓ We provided advice and counsel that led to successful resolution of numerous comics challenges.
- ✓ We provided hundreds of pages of online resources to support comics in education, including resources designed to aid in the use of comics in classrooms and the collection of challenged and banned graphic novels.

Some of the books we defended in 2017:

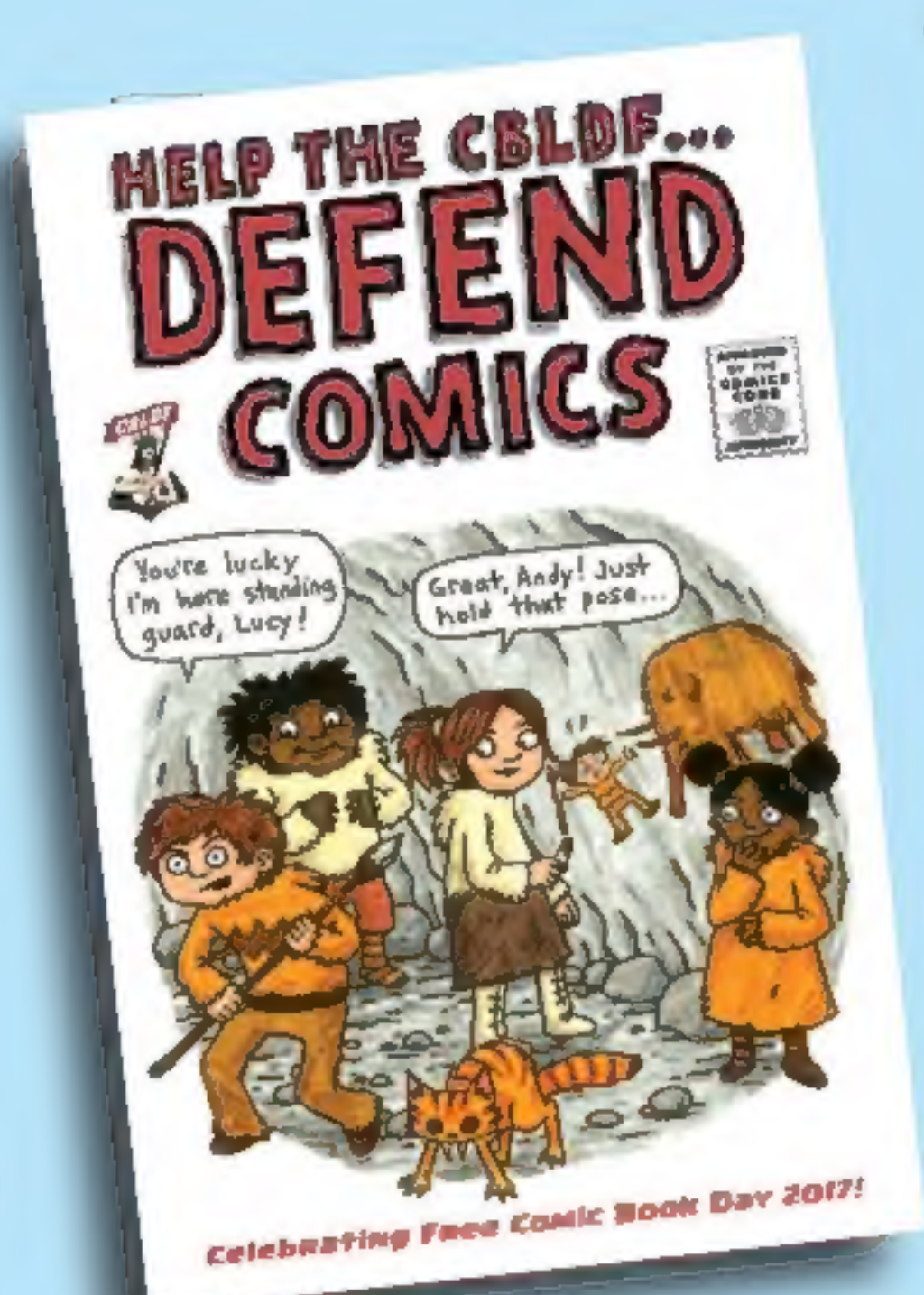
- ✓ *Bone* by Jeff Smith
- ✓ *Sword Art Online 1: Aincrad* by Reki Kawahara and abec
- ✓ *Stuck in the Middle*, ed. by Ariel Schrag

- ✓ *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
- ✓ *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell
- ✓ *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls
- ✓ *Jacob's New Dress* by Sarah and Ian Hoffman
- ✓ *I Am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings, Jessica Herthel, and Shelagh McNicholas
- ✓ *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
- ✓ *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher
- ✓ *This Day in June* by Gayle E. Pitman and Kristyna Litten
- ✓ *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

PUBLICATIONS

CBLDF's publications reach tens of thousands of people every year.

- ✓ We published *Panel Power*, a resource about the benefits of comics that includes activities and reading recommendations for engaging kids with comics. *Panel Power* is an essential tool for retailers, educators, librarians, and parents! Read it here: <http://cbldf.org/panel-power/>
- ✓ *CBLDF Defender* continues to bring readers important news, analysis, and historical perspective on the intersection of free expression and comics. Free in comic book stores, at conventions, and online, our quarterly news magazine is one of the most widely read publications dedicated to free speech. View it online at <http://cbldf.org/cbldf-defender/>
- ✓ CBLDF's *Defend Comics* brings the celebration of free speech to younger readers during Free Comic Book Day. This year's issue featured a cover and story by Jeffrey Brown (*Jedi Academy*, *Darth Vader and Son*) and stories by Jennifer and Matthew Holm (*Babymouse*), Matthew Loux (*The Time Museum*), Falynn K (*Science*



Comics: Bats), and many more!

- ✓ The revamped 2017 edition of the *CBLDF Banned Books Week Handbook* provided information about banned comics, quotes on censorship from some of the biggest creators in the field, information on handling challenges and the rights of librarians, educators, retailers, and readers, and much more.

COALITIONS

Our coalition efforts helped protect the First Amendment on several fronts, and continued alliances that strengthen our efforts on behalf of comics.

- ✓ Chaired by CBLDF Executive Director, Charles Brownstein, the Banned Books Week Coalition celebrated our right to read during this year's event.
- ✓ CBLDF continued our sponsorship of the Kids' Right to Read Project, a leading advocate for the rights of young readers.
- ✓ We remained members of the Media Coalition, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and the Freedom to Read Foundation, providing a voice for comics in some of the most important defenses of free expression in the United States.

APPEARANCES

CBLDF delivered dozens of public appearances at universities, libraries, symposiums, and conventions across the United States and around the world. We exhibited at every major comics convention in the U.S., offering programming on comics censorship and in support of our history of the women who changed free expression in comics, *She Changed Comics*. We also spoke out for the rights of our members on various television and radio outlets. CBLDF Executive Director Charles Brownstein returned to Japan for a speaking tour emphasizing collaboration among international manga professionals to improve the status of intellectual freedom.

We need your support to continue our important mission in 2018!

Donate today!

<http://cbldf.org/contribute/donate/>

THE CHRISTMAS PANIC!



MASSACHUSETTS' WAR ON SATIRE COMICS!

It was "The Night Before Christmas." At least that was the name of the story in *Panic* #1, a 1953 release from EC Comics. The story stirred so much controversy that it was banned in the state of Massachusetts. This is the story of the Christmas Panic...

by Joe Sergi

Prior to 1947, Educational Comics, a publishing company founded by Maxwell "Charlie" Gaines, marketed comics about science, history, and the Bible to schools and churches. Charlie is well known to comic fans as the originator of the four-color, saddle-stitched newsprint pamphlet that would eventually evolve into the American comic book and as the creator of *Funnies on Parade* and Dell Publishing's *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics*, either of which would be considered by many to be the first modern comic book. Before starting EC Comics, Charlie also worked as the co-publisher of All-American Publications, which produced books starring Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, and Hawkman. When EC Comics acquired All-American, Charlie was able to retain the rights to *Picture Stories from the Bible*, a title previously released by All-American, and produce it through Educational Comics. The Bible stories were soon joined by other *Picture Stories* books based on science, American history, and world history.

Due to poor sales, Charlie eventually had to abandon the Educational Comics model, change the name of the company to Entertaining Comics, and produce juvenile all-ages humor books

such as *Tony Tots* and *Animal Fables*. Sadly, these did little better in the marketplace. EC Comics was failing.

Everything changed in August 1947, when Charlie went boating on Lake Placid with his friend Sam Irwin. On that August day, another boat collided with their speedboat, killing both Charlie and Irwin. Irwin's young son survived, pushed to safety at the last moment by Charlie, who apparently sacrificed himself to save the child. With the death of Maxwell "Charlie" Gaines, the future of EC seemed even bleaker. Then his son, William "Bill" Gaines, entered the picture.

Bill Gaines wanted nothing to do with his father's business. Instead, he wanted to be a chemistry teacher. Unfortunately, his plans were derailed when he had to go off to war in his last year of school. After the war, at the age of 25, Bill planned to return to New York University to finish his degree. Once again, fate intervened. With the death of his father, Bill Gaines inherited EC Comics.

Read the whole story at <http://cblddf.org/?p=16098>



Panel from “The Night Before Christmas” by Will Elder.
(From *Panic* #1, 1953. Published by Dark Horse Comics, Inc.)

Like his father, Bill loved popular culture. However, Bill did not share the same wholesome view of the comics industry as the elder Gaines. So, in addition to advertising and selling back issues of the Educational titles, Bill concentrated on adding more adult titles to the Entertaining Comics line. He changed the direction of the company from juvenile humor books, romance, and westerns into science fiction, horror, and satire. The rise and fall of EC Comics in the first two categories can fill volumes, but this piece will focus on *MAD* and its trouble-making sister publication *Panic*.

MAD premiered in August 1952 and was the brainchild of Harvey Kurtzman. Earlier that year, Kurtzman persuaded Bill to publish a satirical humor comic. In *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman, the Mad Genius of Comics* by Denis Kitchen and Paul Buhle, Kurtzman explains the style developed for *MAD*:

Satire and parody work best when what you are talking about is accurately targeted; or to put it another way, satire and parody work only when you reveal a fundamental flaw or untruth in your subject. Just as there was a treatment of reality in those war books, there was a treatment of reality running through *MAD*; the satirist / parodist tries not to just entertain his audience but to remind it of what the real world is like.

The first issue promised “Humor in a Jugular Vein.” The issue contained parodies based on the work of Kurtzman’s co-worker Al Feldstein, who was responsible for many of EC’s horror comics. Although *MAD* started slow, sales of the comic soon climbed to more than 750,000 cop-

ies per month. A year later, the book had many imitators, including *Madhouse*, *Bughouse*, *Crazy*, *Eh!*, *Whack*, and *Nuts*. David Hajdu, explains what happened next in *The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America*:

Al Feldstein, less than sanguine about the success of a magazine that had begun as a parody of his work, brought a proposition to Gaines bold even by Feldstein’s standards.... “You know how everybody’s imitating *MAD*? Well, why don’t we put out our own imitation of *MAD*? The market will bear it, obviously.”

Panic was born, first appearing on newsstands in December 1953. The book promised, “Humor in a Varicose Vein.” The first issue featured several stories and included spoofs of pulp detectives (“My Gun Is the Jury,” featuring a cross-dressing Mickey Spillane), television (“This is Your Strife”), and fairy tales (“Little Red Riding Hood”).

It was the story entitled “The Night Before Christmas” that would cause trouble for EC Comics. In the eight-page story, the original text of Clement Clarke Moore’s 1822 poem “A Visit From Saint Nicholas” was paired with new illustrations by Will Elder. In the course of 32 panels, Elder was able to incite, enrage, and upset sensitive readers into actions that would prophesize the future treatment of comics in general and EC Comics in particular.

Elder’s illustrations ranged from dead animals (“not a creature was stirring”) to sexy pin ups of Marilyn Monroe (“visions of sugarplums danced in their heads”). Even Santa himself was not free from the satirical attack. His red Cadillac sled proudly announced that he was “just divorced,” and Mr. Claus carried a sack full of poison and counterfeiting kits. Will Elder even drew himself into the story (“then turned with a jerk”). Even the cover featured old Saint Nick in a gag involving an unsuspecting Santa walking into a bear trap set at the bottom of the chimney by a child who was obviously destined for the permanent naughty list.

The authorities, already disenchanted with comics because of the media attacks by Dr. Fredric Wertham and his ilk, did not get the jokes in *Panic*. Elder speculates in *The Ten Cent Plague*:

That was the beginning of the whole hullabaloo for EC. It didn’t take very much. There were people

out there who really didn't like the idea that we were doing something for kids... [that] made fun of things that were supposed to be sacred, like Santa Claus. We never saw it coming.

Apparently, *Panic #1* was too much for some people. First, several Massachusetts residents complained to state Attorney General George Fingold. On December 18, 1953, Fingold called for the Massachusetts Governor's Council to ban the comic book *Panic* within the state on the grounds it desecrated Christmas. The governor's council cited the fact that the book featured a recently divorced Santa Claus as well as the instruments of violence carried on the sled as grounds for the ban, declaring it depicted Christmas in a pagan manner.

Under orders from the Governor's Council and Attorney General Fingold, the police were ordered to stop all distribution of *Panic* throughout Massachusetts. They were very successful, and by December 21, the book had been pulled from nearly all newsstands in the greater Boston area. Interestingly, it's not clear whether the police, the Attorney General, or even the Governor's Council had the authority to actually ban the book. Equally unclear is what crime would have been charged if someone had refused to follow the ban. Of course, this did not stop Fingold from announcing that he was considering criminal charges against Bill Gaines and EC Comics. *The New York Times* reported:

George Fingold, Massachusetts Attorney General, threatened criminal proceedings last week against Mr. Gaines unless the comic book... was withdrawn voluntarily.... [T]he book depicted Christmas in a 'pagan' manner and pictured Santa Claus as 'just divorced' with reindeers that appeared

variously as Cupid, a ballet dancer, a horse and a football team.

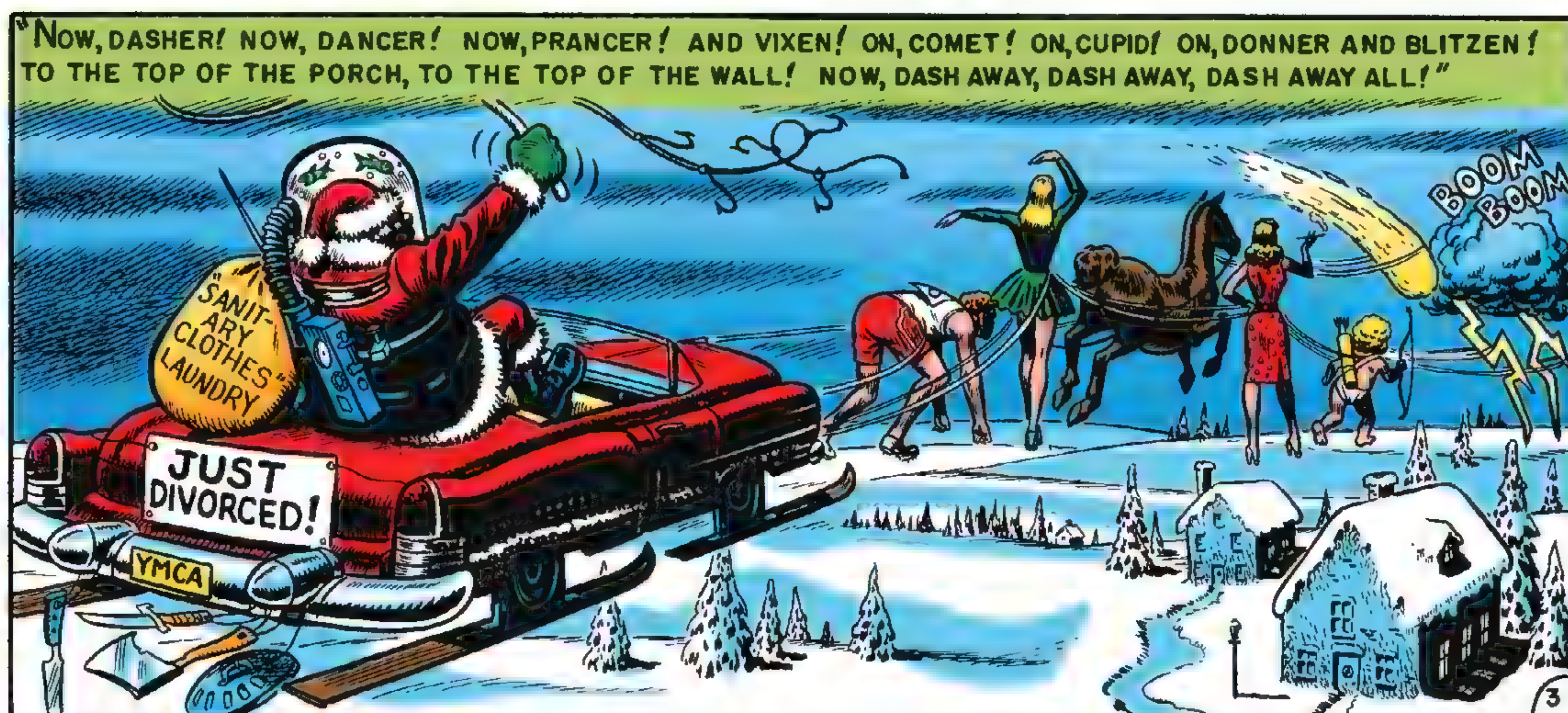
Not one to avoid controversy, Bill Gaines immediately reacted to the ban. First, he announced that he would permanently withdraw *Panic* from distribution in the state of Massachusetts and stop selling his *Picture Stories From the Bible* in the state as well. In *The Ten Cent Plague*, Feldstein explained, "The idea was, 'If you don't want us, we don't want you,'" Feldstein added that "he had felt a 'certain literary pride' in having his book banned."

Second, on December 28, 1953, Martin J. Sheiman, Gaines's attorney, made comments to *The New York Times* that probably made newsman Francis Pharcellus Church, who wrote "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus" for *The New York Sun*, turn over in his grave. The article states:

The ban was a 'gross insult' to the intelligence of Massachusetts citizens. 'Every reasoning adult knows that there just isn't any Santa Claus'... He charged that the publisher William Gaines, had suffered 'wanton damage' to his interests so that censors could 'come to rescue of a wholly imaginary, mythological creature rarely believe to exist by children more than a few years old.'

In later years, Bill would soften his position and later told *The Comics Journal*:

And I just wanted to point out that the trouble we had on the Santa Claus story was Bill Elder. He had put a sign on the sleigh of Santa Claus, 'Just Divorced.' Now how do a bunch of iconoclastic, atheist bastards like us know that Santa Claus is a saint and that he can't be divorced and that this is going to offend Boston?



This panel fueled the ban of *Panic #1* in Massachusetts.
(From *Panic #1*, 1953. Published by Dark Horse Comics, Inc.)

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 1–4, 2018: Emerald City Comic Con

- Washington State Convention Center, Seattle, WA
- www.emeraldcitycomiccon.com

March 23–25, 2018: WonderCon Anaheim

- Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA
- www.comic-con.org/wca

April 6–8, 2018: C2E2

- South Building, McCormick Place, Chicago, IL
- www.c2e2.com

Schedule subject to change. Visit cbldf.org for updates.

NOW AVAILABLE



Panel Power!

Cover: Matthew Loux
Art: various

CBLDF spotlights the power of comics to make lifelong readers! An introduction to comics, including activities, reading recommendations, and evidence-based background on why they're good for kids, that battles misconceptions about the format. (Donations start at \$5 for a bundle of 10; <http://tinyurl.com/yc9xlszf>)

RETAIL MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Our retail members are an important part of the fight for the freedom to read comics. We recently spoke with Matthew and Annette Price, co-owners of Speeding Bullet Comics in Norman, Oklahoma, about engaging kids with comics and battling misconceptions about the format.

Annette and Matthew Price.
(Photo by Caleb Slinkard, Norman Transcript.)



What are some ways you engage your community with comics?

We are very pro-literacy and have engaged with local schools to reward students and to promote reading. Certainly Free Comic Book Day is a big outreach for us to the community. We hold author signings, reading clubs, art classes, and other events throughout the year to make a connection with the community. When kids bring in their school folders, we give them free comics throughout the year. We are working with our local school to plan a family literacy night where parents read with their kids. We've been here since 1998, and it's gratifying to see some customers who first came in as kids now bring their kids in to introduce them to the comic art form and to reading.

As a retailer, how do you battle misconceptions that lead to attempts to censor comics?

Comics are great for kids in many cases, but they aren't only for kids. Because it's easy to see an image out of context, sometimes people may react strongly. It's important to try to give context to customers and others who are interested in the artform.

We advise every adult who comes in with a child, or has identified themselves as a parent, that comics are a diverse medium. And just like there are all kinds of movies, there are all kinds of comics. We empower them to flip through the books and answer any questions so they may make their own decisions for their children.

Why is CBLDF's mission important to you?

We are big believers in the First Amendment and its importance to Americans. Retailers can find themselves on the front lines of the battle for free speech, and it's important to have an organization like the CBLDF to help protect that right.

JOIN THE FIGHT!

We have membership plans for donors in every budget, and all of them are tax-deductible:

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- **\$500 Protector Member** All of the above, plus the CBLDF embossed executive journal!
- **\$1,000 Champion Member** All of the above, plus recognition in *CBLDF Liberty Annual 2018* and the CBLDF tote bag!
- **\$2,500 Guardian Member** All of the above, plus special recognition in select CBLDF publications throughout 2018!

Use the signup form on the back cover of this magazine or visit <http://cbldf.myshopify.com/collections/memberships> to join today!



Art by Vanesa R. Del Rey



RADIO FREE COMIX!

A mix of interviews, discussions about censorship, panel recordings, and archival materials, the CBLDF Podcast is a monthly event, from our keyboards to your ears. In the most recent episodes: interviews with editor, publisher, writer, and translator **Anne Ishii** (Massive Goods) and artist and writer **Jeffrey Brown** (*Darth Vader and Son*, *Jedi Academy*)! The CBLDF Podcast is made possible in part by a donation from the Gaiman Foundation and member support.

Listen at <http://cbldf.org/podcast>





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